

Road decommissioning is used to close a system road to motorized travel and remove it from the national forest system roads inventory. The need to decommission a road may be to eliminate unneeded roads, reduce chronic sediment delivery, restore hillslope hydrology, or reduce impacts to aquatic, riparian, and terrestrial ecosystems of roads crossings. The Forest Service uses different levels of decommissioning treatments to reduce hazards with roads. Forest Service personnel have learned which decommissioning treatments are effective based on local climatic conditions, geology, and soil type. Specific effects of each road and the response to a decommissioning treatment are strongly influenced by local factors which include climate, geology, topography, soil, road design and construction. Forest interdisciplinary teams are responsible for developing monitoring plans that can evaluate the effectiveness of decommissioning treatments.

Road decommissioning is defined as: "Activities that result in the stabilization and restoration of unneeded roads to a more natural state." (36 CFR 212.1, FSM 7705 – Transportation System) The Forest Service Manual (7712.11- Exhibit 01) identifies five types of treatments for road decommissioning which can achieve the intent of the definition. These include the following:

1. Block entrance
2. Revegetation and waterbarring
3. Remove fills and culverts
4. Establish drainageways and remove unstable road shoulders
5. Full obliteration recontouring and restoring natural slopes

These five treatment types provide the interdisciplinary team a wide range of options and combination of options to stabilize and restore unneeded roads. In some cases restoration may be achieved by blocking the entrance. In other situations, objectives to restore hillslope hydrology may require full obliteration recontouring.

Decommissioning a road eliminates the deferred maintenance needs for the road. Portions of decommissioned road may remain if they do not cause problems nor require maintenance. (Financial Health – Common Definitions for Maintenance and Construction Terms, July 22, 1998)